

Straight to the Bottom Line – September 1, 2011

By: Steve Martin

Fall!

There is no question that fall is my favorite time of the year. As the temperatures begin to cool off and the kids go back to school it just seems like fall is a time for new beginnings, fresh starts and renewed vigor. But that's not the real reason why I love the fall. The real reason is football! So, I thought it was a good time for a football to dairy management analogy.

In my job, I log lots of hours and miles driving from farm to farm. Sports radio helps pass that time. The recent preseason football coverage has been dominated by interviews with coaches about how they are preparing for the upcoming season. Whenever I hear one of these coaches talk about their team and their coaching staff, I can't help but think about the parallels between a football coach and a dairy owner. The comparisons are many. With the head coach comparing to the dairy owner, several coaching success stories offer ideas for successful dairy management. The one I want to talk about today is how the head coach leans on his assistant coaches. For the purpose of this discussion, let's consider the dairy vet as the defensive coordinator, your nutritionist as the offensive coordinator, your accountant as your athletic director, your herdsman as your assistant head coach, your feeder as your head trainer, your farmer as your recruiting coordinator, your fresh cow guy as your special teams coach and the teams attorney as well, your attorney. You get the picture.

As a team gets ready for the upcoming year, the successes and failures of the previous season serve as the primary discussion points for the current year's plan. I am certain that the head coach spends time with each assistant developing areas of priority for improvement. It is this task that I want to suggest to you as a dairy producer to learn a couple of things from the ol' ball coach. As a dairy owner looks at the new start offered by the fall season, it is time to sit down with each of your assistant coaches, evaluate past performance and pick a couple of areas that need the most improvement.

I wanted to make a couple of suggestions for some of your assistants. With your vet, look at recent reproductive performance and see if improvements are needed. Maybe it's a more aggressive timed AI program or maybe the reproduction techs need additional training to improve compliance. Look at the key repro performance indicators and set some goals. And, how about a meeting with your nutritionist to review overall dairy performance? How did the dairy survive the summer heat stress? Are there alternative ingredients that need to be considered? And don't forget the plan to get ready for new crop change-overs for your forages. Tie the nutritionist in with discussions with your feeding staff. These guys handle more of your daily costs than anyone else on the dairy. Are they tuned up and ready for the season? Maybe it is time for another feeder school due to new employees or procedural drift. As it relates to your fresh cow staff, how is recent fresh cow transition health? Have you looked at the performance numbers lately? What is your fresh cow survivability through 30 DIM?

There is certainly

lots of interaction with your farming staff in the fall as harvest comes and goes. Now is a good time to think about the successes of the current crop and plans for the future. It will be time to prepay for seed again before you know it!

As with the football coaches meetings, the assistant head coach (herdsman) should be involved in all of these discussions. He needs to mirror you in almost every aspect of the operation. You can't be everywhere all the time and there has to be another individual that pretty much knows what is going on in every department. Your head herdsman needs to be an extension of you to make sure the plan goes forward.

So, as you begin to enjoy some football on Friday nights, hot Saturday afternoons or from the lazy boy on Sunday, pay attention to how the successful coaches manage the game. Maybe you could learn a thing or two to help your dairy!